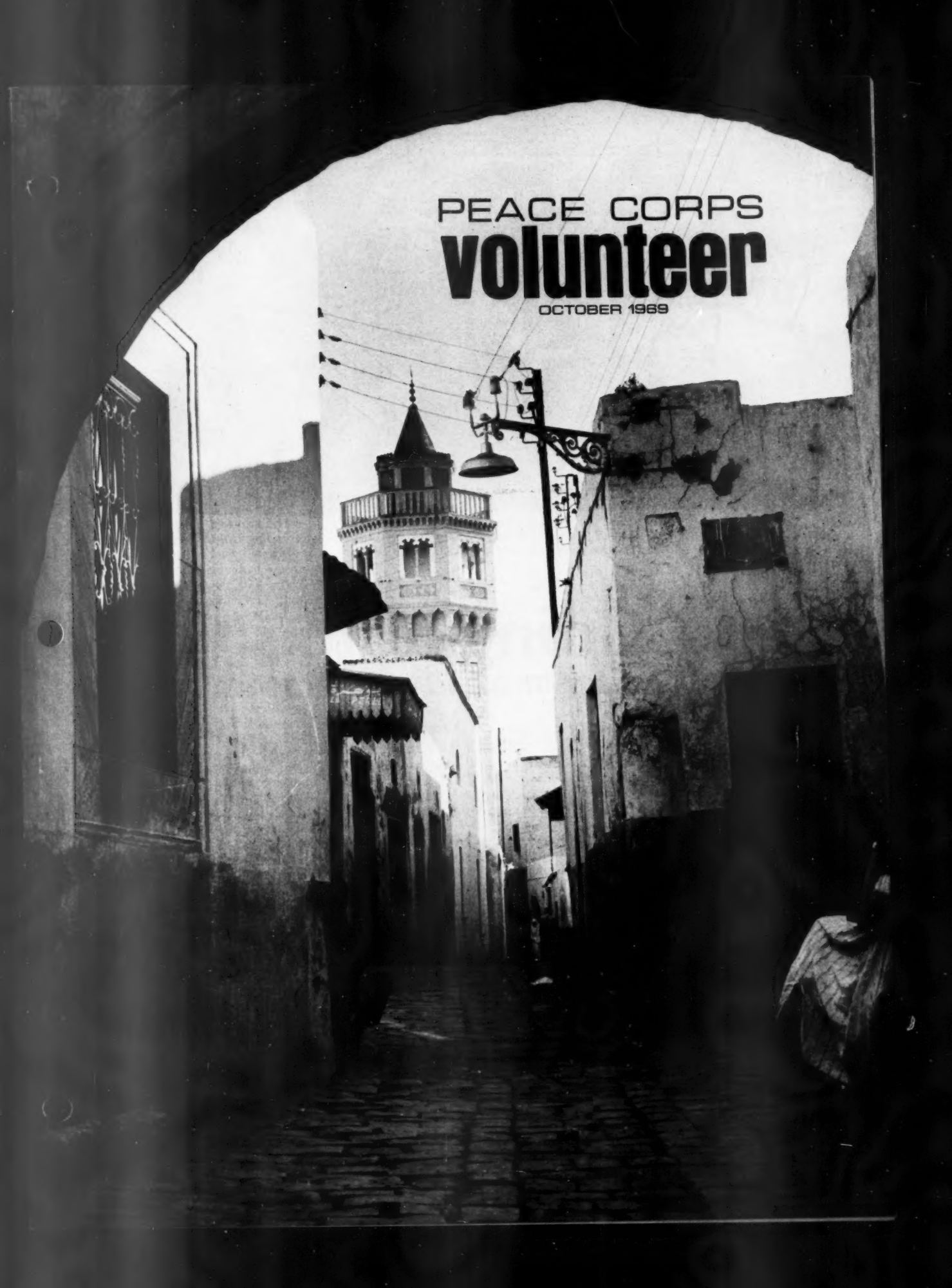

PEACE CORPS

volunteer

OCTOBER 1969

Volunteers to America discuss their host country and its problems during their termination conference held at Peace Corps headquarters in late August.

Going home

to Asia, Africa and Latin America

The host nationals displayed a strange mixture of openness and smugness; they were both curious and close-minded. They ate, bathed, slept and traveled differently. Sometimes color-conscious, often self-righteous, they ignored foreigners--or asked them silly questions. But one could feel comfortable among them, after getting used to their ways.

The host nationals were Americans. And the host country, the United States, was being seen through the eyes of Volunteers to America who had spent one and two years here. The VTAs' recent termination conference was proof that the aspirations, the problems and the reactions of volunteers serving in foreign nations are more often than not the same--no matter what country.

VTA II (the volunteers' unofficial group title) met at Peace Corps headquarters the last week of August. Their conference was informal; it consisted mostly of small group discussions of: views of the U.S.--its people, culture and problems; the future of VTA; the year's assignments; the problems of "going home." With the exception of one discussion group, all the meetings were conducted in the volunteers' common language and the tongue of the host nationals--English.

About 45 volunteers participated in the conference. Twenty of them were "extendees," volunteers who had finished their second year of service (the regular VTA tour lasts one year).

In the two years of VTA's existence, a total of 105 volunteers representing 16 countries have come to work in U.S. public schools and VISTA projects. The 16 countries included three in which the Peace Corps does not serve--Argentina, Israel and Japan.

The program has been sponsored by the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Recently, however, the State Dept. transferred the program to the Peace Corps, which is currently seeking Congressional approval to spend a portion of its funds on VTA. (See budget story on page 21.)

Uncertainty about the future of their program underscored the tough questions the volunteers asked themselves about their role in this country. What are we doing here? Does America really need us? What have we accomplished, they wanted to know. As with Peace Corps Volunteers asking the same questions, there were no definitive answers. Ultimately the VTAs themselves offered the best solutions to their queries--by pointing out change here and there, a school or community situation in which they had succeeded or learned while failing, a difference of attitude in themselves or in the people around them, a feeling of belonging while they were here, a sense of finding their "place"

and living it—despite difficulties and frustrations.

Difference in cultural background was often a source of the greatest frustrations—and the greatest lessons.

Ali-Asghar Eftekhary from Iran taught social studies near Harrisburg, Pa., and in Los Angeles. "I've never had the experience of being white or black before," he said.

Time was another new problem for him. "I am used to working long hours everyday," said Eftekhary, "and at first I didn't know what to do when I got home from school at 3 p.m. and didn't know anyone around."

Costa Rican volunteer Rafael Howell, who taught sports and social studies in Ellensburg, Wash., explained: "In my teaching in Costa Rica I used to get mad everyday. But in two years teaching here I only lost my temper three times. For two reasons I held my temper—because I wanted to be a good ambassador for Costa Rica and because I could never be completely sure of what reaction there would be to my choice of words or my actions."

A Japanese volunteer found that his working and living situation in the U.S. tended to reinforce his own cultural heritage. "I feel even more Japanese now than I did when I came," he said.

Jamaican volunteer Sylvia Tucker thought her culture was a disadvantage in her work as a youth counselor in a VISTA project. "I believe that even a white American has more in common with black Americans than black foreigners do," she said. When Miss Tucker did not explain her "foreignness" right away, the people in her community began to believe she was "trying to be something that I wasn't—they couldn't understand what or who I was."

"To be very frank, as an American black, I would not join VISTA," Miss Tucker continued. "And as a foreign black, it would not be my first choice. The answer to this culture problem is to start talking about a team concept: a black American, a black foreigner and a white American working together."

A VTA attached to VISTA in Boynton Beach, Fla., Japanese Shoji Oue, found he could use his "foreignness" to good advantage. People who were curious about him took the initiative to get to know him, making it easier to become a part of the community. Of the cultural differences of color, Oue said, "Black people can speak sign language; they are easy to talk to, even though I sometimes have to translate their English into white Americans' English."

One attitude which seemed common to all the VTAs was their sensitivity toward the people in the communities in which they worked. From Oue in Florida to Mariana Scardino, an Argentinean assigned to the Henry St. Settlement in New York City, concern for the "people" predominated. Miss Scardino took on the VTA program itself in her concern: "The State Department decided to have this program, our governments decided to go along with it, we decided to join. But no one ever asked the people in the communities we went to what they thought about it. . . ." She had the same questions about the presence of VISTA in the communities.

Another volunteer said, "Many of these young VISTA kids sit around for a year and have a ball, because they feel the community didn't ask for them; they have no jobs. I didn't come here to have a ball; I could have done that at home."

Given their economic and social backgrounds, most of the VTAs probably could have had a "ball" at home; they were mostly from their countries' "middle classes," employed as social

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ON THE COVER: A principal street in the Arab town of Bizerte links most of the significant commercial and civic structures. The foreground arch announces the entrance to the tomb of a prominent holy man. In the distance, the chief mosque is marked by a minaret.

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Pat Brown, editor; Judy Thelen, associate editor; Lynn Hennessey, editorial assistant. Design by Paul Reed.

Correspondents: **AFGHANISTAN:** Don C. Yager. **BRAZIL:** Mike McCullough. **BRITISH HONDURAS:** Lon Hanke. **CHAD:** Jay Boekelheide, Tom Mann. **CHILE:** Charles Smith, Jr. **COLOMBIA:** Scott James. **COSTA RICA:** Roger Hamilton. **DOMINICAN REPUBLIC:** Jonathan Lash, Bill White. **EASTERN CARIBBEAN:** Bill Barrett. **ECUADOR:** Charles Creesy. **ETHIOPIA:** Susan Heck. **FIJI:** David Downes. **GUYANA:** Paul Richard. **INDIA:** Richard McWilliams, Jonathan Lipsky, Charles Ryan. **IRAN:** Michael Sarka. **IVORY COAST:** William P. Carpenter. **JAMAICA:** Glenn Oshiro. **KENYA:** Berne Ellenson. **KOREA:** Aaron Gurwitz. **LESOTHO:** Stephen Lehmann. **LIBYA:** Victor Gramigna, Patrick Hilliard. **MALAWI:** T. D McCloskey, Jr., John Shannon. **MALAYSIA:** Sharon Clarke Oudemool. **MICRONESIA:** Chuck Freedman. **MOROCCO:** Kenneth Agata, Roberta Prees. **NEPAL:** Jonathan Fox. **NIGERIA:** Bob Larson. **PARAGUAY:** Suzanne Tingley. **PERU:** Lucy Conger, Karl Lorenz. **SWAZILAND:** Mike Ascolese. **THAILAND** Mike Schmuecker. **TONGA:** Joella Bisson. **UPPER VOLTA:** Bob Singley. **URUGUAY:** William Purdy. **VENEZUELA:** Edward Thiele.

workers and teachers, including a school principal, a doctor, a journalist. Many of them had been doing volunteer work before coming to the U.S., however, and all were concerned about getting involved in helping to solve their countries' problems when they returned.

In most instances, the fact that they were "middle class" helped them in their work in the U.S., where often they taught the children of middle class parents or had to work with "middle class attitudes" in their community projects.

According to Argentinean Maria Gagliardo, who taught in Norfolk, Va., and Temple City, Calif., "It is in the middle class—in its reactions—where the real problems of the U.S. are. . . . It's very difficult to reach the hearts of white middle class people because of the wall of protection they have built up around themselves. You have to set your goals to try to affect just a few people," she said. "The only thing is, it's hard to keep your volunteer spirit in a middle class environment."

Japanese volunteer Shoji Oue: "Black people can speak sign language; they are easy to talk to, even though I sometimes have to translate their English into white Americans' English."

Another Argentinean, Irene R. Queiro, who worked at an Indian reservation in Cherokee, N.C., and later at Hull House in Chicago, disagreed with Miss Gagliardo about working with middle class persons as a first priority.

"Our program is now so small, we should work with the poorer classes," she said. "As volunteers from foreign countries, we can bring them a world unknown to them, and in many cases, we are the only way they will ever know that world."

The volunteers had already done a lot of thinking and planning about what they would do when they returned to their own countries. Some hoped to work with Peace Corps programs; others planned to return to the social work and teaching which involved them when they joined VTA. All felt they were taking back lessons learned while serving in the U.S.

A time for change

Eftekhary joined Volunteers to America because he wanted to get better ideas for teaching and health work in Iran, and he wanted to learn more about himself. He felt he had accomplished these goals, and learned more besides. "I have discovered there are places worse than south of Tehran," he said.

Fellow Iranian Hassan Kassai, who taught social studies in Baltimore, explained what he had learned about when to push for change: "I might consider changes in government and in institutions, but I would never presume to change my mother."

Volunteer Margarita Ramos of Colombia taught children of migrant workers in Fredonia, N.Y., and Cucamonga, Calif. She came to the VTA program "to be free, to find myself. But," she said, "this year I had so much freedom that I don't want to have it anymore."

Cho Whee-il thought his experience as a VISTA worker in Cherokee, N.C., and at Hull House in Chicago would help him to be a "real excellent" social worker when he returned to Korea.

But Miss Gagliardo of Argentina perhaps spoke most eloquently about "going home" when she said: "I have become so critical of my own society through looking at the problems of U.S. society that I will have to be very careful when I go back. And I don't feel like being careful—that's the problem."

Argentinean volunteer Maria del Carmen Gagliardo receives a certificate of service from Neil Boyer, coordinator of the Volunteers to America program. Other volunteers look on.

America, *the host country*

By MARIA GAGLIARDO

Two questions I was often asked during my service as a Volunteer to America were: Can the United States really use the help of foreign volunteers? And, which American social group is in more need of that help? To the first question, I answer yes, there is a role for foreign volunteers. To the second, I can think only of one answer—white middle class Americans are in more need of help.

I consider *the* American tragedy to be the amazing fact that the majority of this country's most powerful and largest class does not know how poor it is, how underdeveloped it is. Its poverty is of a different kind; its underdevelopment of a different quality.

For more than two years I've been working in the East and the West of this country, mostly with middle class Americans. I've been their colleague in public schools; their speaker in colleges and universities, community clubs and Sunday schools; their guest; their friend. Learning to know them I learned to know myself better as a member of a similar social group, the middle class of my own country. I also learned to know and analyze that group. I have come to the conclusion that, as a whole, we middle class people are a group of people to be sorry about.

I was born and raised in a middle class environment. Not being very happy with the social injustice that

seems to be a discussed but accepted fact in our world, I must recognize that neither did I do much about it. Though I thought I was helping, in fact what I was doing was passing out to my students, most of them from very poor families, my own middle class values: the key to success is study and hard work.

But it doesn't work that way, not any more. And we know it. What is success after all? What kind of success are we talking about? Why should I think that my own ideas of success are a desirable goal for somebody else? What happens then when other people don't agree with me? Shall I accuse them of being failures?

It was painful but healthy to recognize the inconsistency of my beliefs. I achieved this recognition during my two years of volunteer service in the United States. It was by observing the cold detachment of so many middle class Americans that I realized the tremendous social blindness of a group of people to which I was somehow related.

Where the poverty is

My first year of service was in Norfolk, Va. There, for the first time, I lived with the racial problem. I also learned the meaning of the word "soul". I learned that only the black people seem to know what it means to have one. I discovered the tremendous solitude of a white who has lost hope in whites but cannot be black. It was in Norfolk that I discovered where the poverty of this country is. Certainly it is not in the ghetto. It took a long time to come to this simple conclusion. Looking back, I can't help but laugh at myself when I remember how green I was!

At first my concern centered on the tremendous ignorance about Latin America in general and Argentina in particular that I found in every school—in every single classroom, at any age level—including teachers. I spent long, difficult months teaching that we Latin Americans don't identify ourselves with a continent, but with the people of a given country; therefore each country has individual goals, cultures, ideals. I spent time giving simple facts such as: Rio de Janeiro is a city in Brazil, not the capital of Argentina, etc.

As time went by, I came to the conclusion that those things were not very important. Not then, not yet. What is the relevance of Americans learning the history and culture of other countries when they try so hard to ignore the important role that black Americans played in their own history and culture? How can they understand and respect Latin Americans' cultures when the Mexican Americans are so poorly treated and underpaid in this country?

But it is not so much in teaching history and geography that we have to work. The real problem is with the mental attitudes of white middle class Americans.

What can we do to change those attitudes? How can we make people realize that the dignity of a human being resides precisely in that, in being a human being, regardless of his color or religion, let alone the work he does or the education he has?

How do you convince people of the fact that, when it comes to human dignity there is no difference between a college professor and a migrant worker? How do you get them to understand that there are very few things that a migrant worker can do to improve his own condition, but there are so many things that a college professor, and many others, could do to help him? How do you persuade skeptics that there are very few, if any, people who are poor out of laziness, but instead, there are many who are poor out of social injustice?

At one point I discovered a way which seemed to help communicate these things to middle class persons. I learned that it was easier for them to be sorry for and understanding about the poor in remote areas of the world—at least remote for them. The problem is they seem to be blind to the fact that the causes of poverty are the same, whether those causes exist abroad or in their own society, and that they as middle class people are an important element in maintaining the status quo which permits these causes to continue to exist. So I found that by first explaining my views as they relate to the poor in my own country, Argentina, and discussing that situation, I was ultimately able to bring the problem —and the solution—closer to home.

I also learned that in the beginning you have to listen, to be open and accepting. If you treat people in this way, then they begin to trust you and they will be open to you when you present your views.

It is working in these ways that a volunteer can do a lot to help people arrive at turning points where they will be able to see and judge their own shortcomings as well as those of others. Even more relevant, a volunteer, through his own example, can help people realize that nobody has the right to be a spectator of other people's misery.

During my second year of service I was assigned to Los Angeles. "The West is different," they told me. Is it really?

If I should have to define California, I would say, in a phrase, it is the land of the "Hi!" culture. Never before have I heard and seen so many smiling and loud "Hi's!" But that was all—people said "Hi!" and then they went on their way. They gave the appearance of caring but it was very superficial. I found no other differences in California. No, I found something else—long-haired intellectuals trying to solve the problems of humanity while sitting on the grass of a university campus.

The same problems

Otherwise, the problems were the same—the same old indifference from the majority, the same old unawareness, the same old injustices and prejudices. Only they were camouflaged in freeways.

So the effort began all over again, this time with a better knowledge of reality and how to approach it.

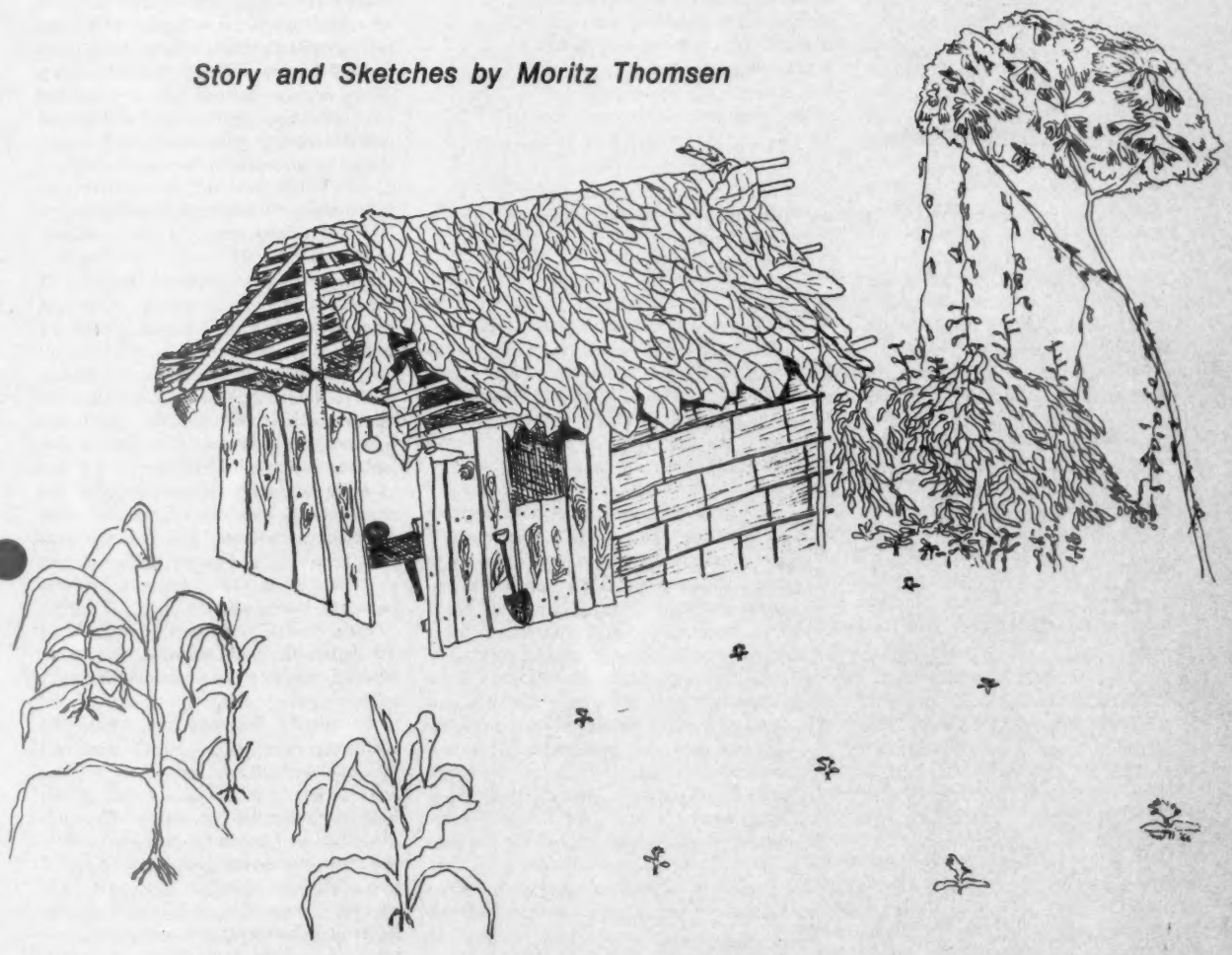
I will never forget the words of Mr. Alec Dickson, the founder of Britain's Voluntary Service Overseas, who spoke at a conference of volunteer agencies last June. He said, "To serve other people's countries is a privilege; to serve our own country is a right, perhaps a duty."

I consider it to have been my personal privilege to have served the United States. Now it is time to go home and exercise the right of serving my own country again.

Maria del Carmen Gagliardo is from Buenos Aires. She was a teacher and a principal in Argentina before becoming a Volunteer to America. During her first year of service in the U.S., she taught in public schools in Norfolk, Va. The next year she spent working as a "volunteer leader", attached to staff at the University of Southern California. She also assisted the school system of Temple City, Calif.

Living Poor AN EXCERPT

Story and Sketches by Moritz Thomsen



Something first-rate has come along in Peace Corps literature —a book that is not a sentimental diary, is not a biography of Volunteers themselves and all their hang-ups of fitting in and adjusting, is not an inventory of foreign adventures and artifacts.

Former Volunteer Moritz Thomsen cuts through all this and lets the reader discover more about the poor people in question than about the Volunteer or his agency or the goals of either.

For those who are not widely experienced or well-read on the subject of The Poor, Thomsen offers a new understanding of the cycle of poverty. While he describes his own starvation as experimental and masochistic, he learned that if one has nothing else to eat, 16 bananas provide the energy one needs to work only until noon . . . that protein starvation in the first 5 years of life can permanently and irrevocably destroy up to 25 per cent of a person's intelligence.

"If 75 is the I.Q. in the town," he asks, "what is the medical word that describes this poor, doomed people, this wasted human resource living out its unproductive destiny in the impregnable prison of a destroyed mind, in a twilight, idiot world where nothing really makes much sense?"

Unlike the pattern of some Volunteers at the end of two years, there is no last minute attempt by Thomsen to claim or identify success; except in the book it is clear that the attitudes of a handful of people changed as a result

of their exposure to him.

The Peace Corps had sent Thomsen to Ecuador as a Volunteer in the Heifer III group. Heifer Project is a nonprofit corporation whose plan it is to get pure blooded animals onto farms around the world and into the hands of farmers who otherwise would be unable to upgrade the quality of their stock. Animals are loaned to individuals or cooperatives which have agreed to feed and care for them properly. The animals are paid for by the farmer replacing them from newborn. The newborn in turn are loaned to another village, another farmer. It is this organization that administers the agricultural projects of the Peace Corps in Ecuador.

The first part of his book deals with his work in the village of La Unión, an assignment aborted when Thomsen had to be hospitalized in the U.S. with a lung infection. In August, 1966, he was reinstated and advised to seek a drier climate than that of La Unión.

An Italian priest from a coastal fishing village north of Esmeraldas had come to the Peace Corps office requesting that a Volunteer come to the town and start some animal projects and work with the people in agriculture. To get there you had to cross the Esmeraldas River in a canoe, catch an old bus that ran along the beach at low tide, then cross another river.

Ignoring the advice he had received about his health, Thomsen and a fellow Volunteer, Ron Dudley, headed to Río Verde. As they walked through the town of 30 houses, they created a quiet sensation.

"It was a Negro town, and there didn't seem to be any of that Indian reserve, that hostility that had so depressed me in La Unión," Thomsen said. "A bunch of kids followed us, but something new was added. A couple of cackling old women in the last house stuck their heads out the window and began joking with us; a granddaughter joined them and told Ron that he was handsome; the men on the street smiled and wished us a good afternoon. It looked like a wonderful place to work. We stopped at one of the three stores for a Coke and asked about renting a house. 'But, *hombre*, I'll rent you the store,' the owner said. 'We just came out for the fiesta, my wife and I, and we're leaving for Esmeraldas in two days.'

"Then we met a guy named Alexandro Martínez who lived in a house across the town square. He immediately involved himself with my problems, and within half an hour I had arranged to take my meals in his house and had hired him to take me by canoe and horseback to the different villages along the Río Verde and the river to the north.

"So, an hour after arriving in Río Verde we had settled all the major problems of living, and the next morning Ron hopped aboard the truck and left me on the beach."

Even for those people who have served overseas already, this book is recommended to give added perspective to that experience. And for those who may still go—especially to Latin America—*Living Poor* and discussions and understanding of the events and feelings it covers are a valid substitute for much of a training program.

In his own introduction, Thomsen says:

"The physical world has been mapped; but in the last analysis the Peace Corps is an intellectual exploration, the chance (if you are patient enough) to enter in some degree into the hearts and minds and feelings of alien peoples with exotic cultures. The final discovery, that we are all ultimately alike, is a hard-earned revelation. And it is well worth the trouble."

His book, which will be on the market in October, is well worth the trouble. With pleasure THE VOLUNTEER magazine presents excerpts from it beginning with this issue.

My first weeks in Río Verde I talked to everyone in town and went up and down the beach blowing off to the tobacco farmers and the fishermen about chickens. They are the most expensive meat in Ecuador at 40 cents a pound. With all the cheap corn and fish and a perfect climate, it seemed that the best way to dazzle the local people with the brilliance of the Peace Corps was to get some successful chicken projects going. There was enthusiasm for the idea of chickens, but the initial cost of bamboo, roof thatching, nails and lumber represented almost prohibitive investment. I had 100 chickens living in my bedroom; it would be time soon to distribute them, and so far there wasn't a single chicken coop in town.

I was sitting in my house drinking coffee when Ramón, a young fisherman, stopped by to visit. He was carrying a paddle.

"Where are you going?" I asked him.

"Up the river," he said. "I've been thinking and thinking about what you told us; I'm going up the river to buy bamboo. I've talked the whole thing over with my wife. If you'll draw me the plans for a *gallinero* I've decided to go in the chicken business."

Ramón was my first real live customer, the first guy in town with enough faith in me to take a chance. "Good," I said. "That's great. I'll even help you build it; I'll donate the nails. Now tell me, what kind of chickens do you want, for eggs or for meat?"

He thought that over for a while and then very gravely told me, "About half and half, I think."

"That's a good idea," I said. "We'll have to divide the house down the middle. Then you can see which type makes the most money for you. Now, as I told you, the main thing is that you have enough money for a balanced ration. Without a balanced ration, without protein, this whole new system is worthless."

"Yes, I understand," he said.

"They have to have milled corn, fish meal, and a vitamin supplement."

"Exactly," Ramón said.

"Good. Now how many chickens do you think you can afford to raise? We have to make the *gallinero* big enough, two and a half square feet for each chicken."

"Yes," Ramón said. "I want to do everything just right. I think I can handle six chickens—three for meat and three for eggs."

God, how I loved Ramón in that moment, for his innocence and for his

honesty and for the modesty of his ambitions.

Just because I was Ramón's "brother" didn't, I discovered, make me a member of the family. Orestes, Ramón's oldest brother, started to hang around the house in the evenings. He was darkly silent and brooding around me, suspicious of the projects I talked about, half under the spell, I think, of the *Policía Rural,* who was convinced that I was an FBI spy and who, Ramón told me, was preaching this conviction in the town. "I don't know what is here, but there is something here, some great richness, some great national treasure, for why else would an *Americano* come to live in a town like this?"

Finally the first 100 Heifer–Peace Corps chickens were ready to sell to the farmers. I charged only for the feed and the vaccine that I had used raising them up to 6 weeks—about 27 cents each. The magnificent squawkers weighed well over a pound, and after living in the same room with me they were extremely lovable creatures, although sort of domineering. I had enjoyed the close relationship, but I was glad to see them go. A few of them had seemed determined to peck my eyes out and had perched on the edge of my bed in the early mornings waiting for me to wake up. Wise to their tricks, I would lie there, eyes tightly shut, and think about Alfred Hitchcock.

Over a period of about three days the farmers arrived with baskets, and we loaded them up, each farmer picking out particular birds that he wanted in his flock. Finally, except for about 600 pounds of chicken shit in my bedroom, nicely mixed with balsa shavings from the mill upstream, everything turned tranquil and placid around the house.

I had browbeaten Ramón into building a house for 12 chickens, but he was a little nervous starting out so big. I got a terrific pleasure out of working with Ramón because he was so enchanted with the things we built. His chicken house looked much the same as everybody else's, but he never tired of talking about how beautiful it was, how much prettier than the others. I visited him three days after he had taken the chickens home and found that he had made little balsa-wood shades for the feed and water. He and his wife Ester spent their free time petting the chickens and lifting each one up to exclaim over its great weight.

I visited the other chicken projects, and there seemed to be no problems. This was a relief, because a week before the distribution the local chickens running free and wild in the town had all come down with cholera and most of them were dead. Nobody was worrying about the gringo chickens catching cholera because "they were vaccinated chickens." When I explained that they were vaccinated only against Newcastle and not cholera, there was no reaction. Nothing could happen to those great-footed, magnificent creatures.

Everything was fine for a couple of weeks, and then Ramón rushed into town one morning to tell me that one of his chickens was picking all the tail feathers out of the others. He was very worried. Some of the chickens had bloody rear ends. "You'll have to separate the chicken right away," I told him. He went home and put the outlaw chicken in the house, tied by a piece of vine to the leg of a stool. The next morning he was back; another chicken in the group was madly pecking out tail feathers.

"Don't panic," I said. "You'll have to separate this one too." Within five days he had separated five chickens; they were tied in the kitchen, outside under palm trees, under the steps. Ramón had a harried look, and he came in one day utterly defeated; all the chickens were pecking each other's tail feathers. "Oh, my God," he said, "I don't want my chickens to die."

I read up on debeaking. We went out and used a red-hot wood chisel to cut and burn a piece of beak from the neurotic creatures. All through the operation Ramón was distraught. I was killing his chickens; I was cutting off too much; I was making them suffer. They looked sort of stupid with their beaks cut off, and I made the mistake of laughing at their appearance. Ramón was furious with me. "You're really enjoying yourself, aren't you?" he would ask me after each hen had gone through her ordeal, giving me the cold glance of total rejection. When we had debeaked 10 of the 12 he told me that that was all, meaning, I found out later, that that was all he could stand for one day.

Before that Ramón used to come by the house almost every evening, along with other of my friends, and visit for a few minutes, but he didn't show up for several days. He sat in the doorway of his *salón* across the street, tilted against the wall, staring at the palm trees. On some days he probably didn't sell more than half a dozen cigarettes and a *Siete Oop*—which means Seven-Up, just in case your Castilian is a little rusty. I would stop by to ask him about the chickens, but he was in a depression, a sort of shock, and he would begin his sentences with expressions like, "If it is God's will." The chickens weren't eating, he told me. How could they, poor creatures? "And you're right, they are sort of ugly."

"But almost every chicken in the United States is debeaked," I said. "Just keep more feed in the bamboo."

"All they eat is the corn, the poor little ones; they can't eat the concentrate, it's too fine."

"You'll have to grind the corn finer, is all."

"Yes, I'll grind it finer; perhaps, God willing, they will learn to eat."

The next day Ramón arrived at the

Moritz Thomsen, a farmer from the West Coast, joined the Peace Corps in 1964 when he was 48 years old. He served four years in Ecuador during which time he made the sensitive observations which now serve as the basis of his book, *Living Poor.* In writing, Thomsen refers to himself with the name his Ecuadorian friends used, Martín.

From the book *Living Poor* by Moritz Thomsen. To be published by the University of Washington Press. 6.95
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house very early in the morning to tell me that the chickens were very nervous and that some of them were going, "squawk, squawk," and turning around in circles. We went out and watched the chickens. They seemed perfectly normal, but some of them were very thin.

"I think it's your imagination," I told him. "In a few days they'll learn how to eat better."

"If God wishes," Ramón said, sadly.

That afternoon the first of the chickens died, and the next day two more died. We had a long conference at the chicken house; we doubled the Terramycin, changed the waterers, ground up new corn with new concentrate. I pointed out a crack in the roof to be fixed. "They have to sleep dry," I told him sternly. "I think they have cholera."

"Vaccinated chickens with cholera," Ramón said. "No, my poor babies are starving to death."

The next night, after all the farmers had left the house, Ramón came to talk; the fourth chicken had just died. "Before you came," he said, "well, you know how poor I was; I had nothing. But I was happy; I lived without worries. But now, my God, I am half crazy with worry." His voice broke and great tears swam in his eyes. "Oh, my poor chickens," he said. "Oh, I don't want them to die."

I had talked to him before about how little by little he could increase his flock; I had told him that I hoped one day he would have 100 chickens. Now, he said, this plan was terrifying. "I think it is God's will that I not have chickens," he told me. "It may even be God's will that I always live poorly, but now I think I will just raise the pair of pigs that you have promised to bring me and not have chickens."

"You can't let four lousy chickens wreck your life," I told him. "I don't think God is involved in this business; you have to consider this experience as a valuable lesson and keep trying."

"No one else has sick chickens," Ramón said. "Only this ignorant, brute *zambo* has sick chickens."

I had to go to Quito for seeds and chicken concentrate, and I talked to my boss, Eduardo Sotomayor, about the problem. Eduardo decided to take me back to Río Verde and look things over. As we walked up the beach with Ramón to look at the chickens, I asked Eduardo to give a good inspirational talk in Spanish about "if at first you don't succeed," etc. Eduardo was magnificent, and Ramón listened intently, impaled on eloquence.

"Did I cut off too much beak?" I asked Eduardo at the chicken house.

"You could have cut off even more," Eduardo said.

"Tell Ramón in Spanish," I said. "He doesn't believe me; he thinks I ruined his chickens."

"But it's not the beaks that's wrong; the birds had cholera."

"Tell Ramón in Spanish," I said. "Tell him in your beautiful, clear Spanish so that he understands perfectly."

Eduardo took the last of the sick chickens back to Quito and sent me the results of the lab report—cholera. Passing Ramón's house a few days later I stopped a minute to talk to Ester. Ramón's seven chickens were eating and dancing around. "Ramón just left," she told me. "He was cutting off the beaks of a couple of chickens that you missed before."

That night Ramón came by the house and apologized for the long doubts he had had about me. "I want to get started right away on the new chicken house," he said. "I'd like to buy 43 of the new chickens to make an even 50, and then after the corn is planted, build another chicken house. By June, God willing, I will have 100 chickens. You know what I'm going to buy when I am rich?" he said, beginning to laugh with delight at the idea. "A pair of shoes. Oh, my God. My God."

* * * * *

The presence of Wai

I heard about Wai a couple of months before I met him. He lived up the beach from town and was almost always out on the sea trying to catch enough fish for his seven or eight children, his widowed mother, and his constantly pregnant wife. The town was boasting about him after one of the local fiestas. In a way he was the town's proudest possession, for he did things that stirred the people in the depths of their unconscious. He had been getting quietly drunk in Pablo's *salón*, and five or maybe eight men from across the river had taunted him, secure in their collective strength. Wai had taken them all on at once, tossing them out through doors and windows, along with all the tables and chairs and finally Pablo himself, and then had stood alone in the *salón*, made dark now by the overturned and broken lamp, bawling to all his friends who stayed discreetly alert in the corners of the empty room, "Just don't touch me, just please, don't anybody touch me." So I liked Wai before I ever saw him. I knew just how he felt; he stirred things in my own unconscious.

I met Wai on my first Christmas Eve in Río Verde in Ramón's depressing *salón* where I had gone to drink beer. Wai was sitting at a table with three other fishermen, all of them wearing tattered clothes and no shoes, all of them with the patient but slightly distraught faces of alcoholics without a penny between them for a drink but secure in the possibility of a miracle.

Wai dominated the table; no, he dominated the whole room. He wasn't a giant exactly, but in this country of small, delicate people, his 6 feet and 190 pounds gave him all the qualities of a monument. He was 34 years old, and the amazing thing about his face was that there was nothing written on it, absolutely nothing. It was as pure and open, as free from vice, passion, sadness or terror—in short, from life itself—as the carved alabaster mask of an Egyptian god. In one light his face was almost pure Negro, in another light, pure Indian. He held his great hands peacefully open and unmoving upon his knees. Looking at him you knew that his rags, made doubly conspicuous in the midst of all the Christmas finery, were only a disguise. He had arrived on earth to test mankind.

"Is that guy over there the one who beat up on all the Palestina tramps?" I asked Ramón, already knowing.

"Yes," Ramón said, proudly. "That's my friend, Wai." He rushed over and, like a small puppy attacking a tiger, began feinting and pummeling at Wai, who sat there as placidly as an idol accepting Ramón's homage.

An hour later the four fishermen were still sitting at the table waiting, with those quiet, peaceful expressions on their faces, as the Christmas celebration swirled around them. I couldn't stand it and asked Ramón to send a bottle of *aguardiente* over to their table. Half an hour later Wai bought a bottle of beer, came over to our table, introduced himself, and presented me with the beer. He was a man of propriety.

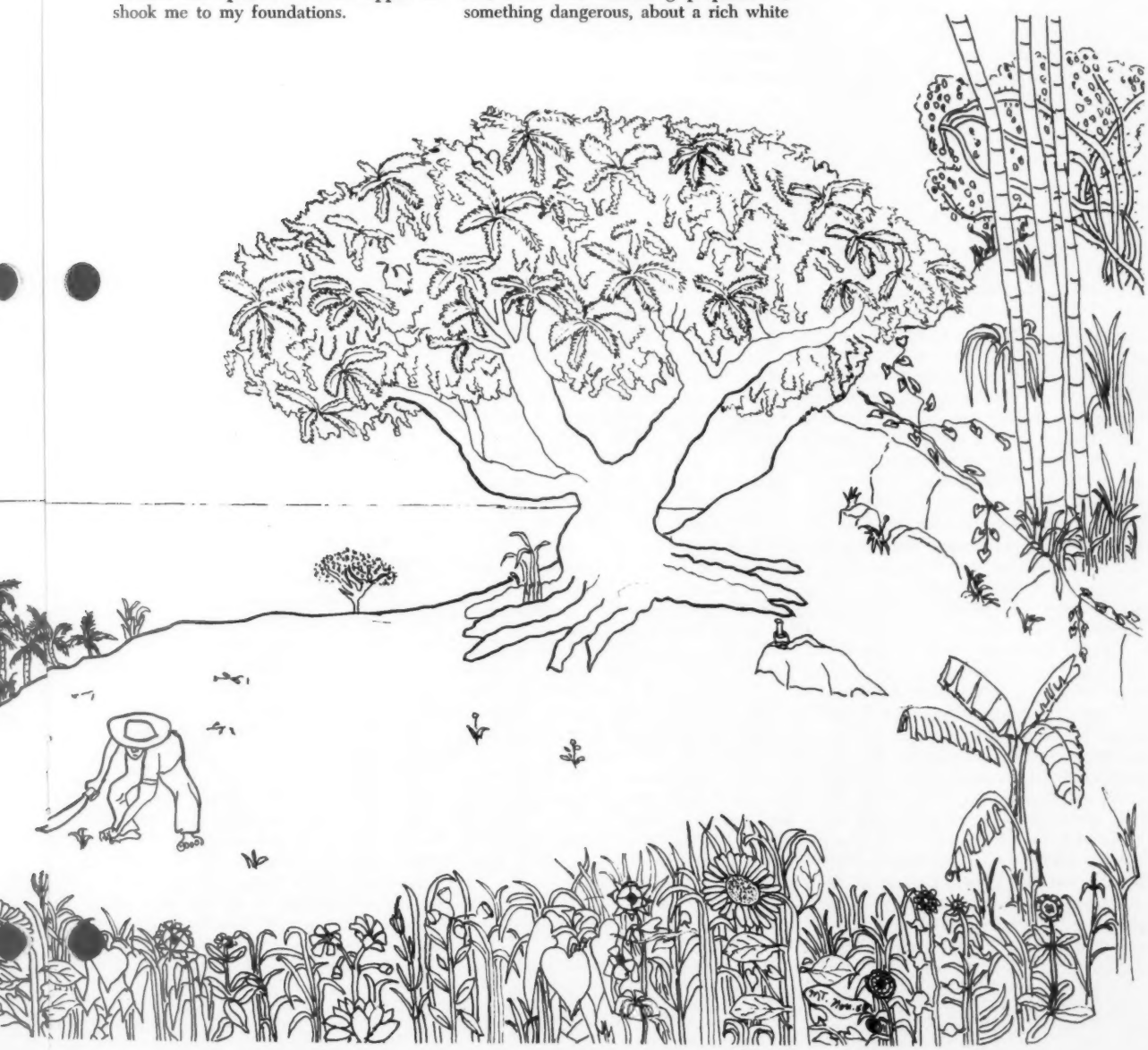
He was as shy as a girl with me, and I with him. I was in a presence. For the first time in my life I had come up against a natural man, a man without a façade, without a mask. He was as simple, as placid, as uncomplicated as Adam —before the episode with the apple. It shook me to my foundations.

That first year I could never work with Wai. He was wildly independent and not a little in love with his own poverty. He was probably the poorest man in town aside from a couple of hopeless drunkards and my neighbor, Carlos Torres, who was so shiftless that he and his family would have died of hunger if his mother didn't somehow feed them. Wai's poverty gave him a certain status. Everyone loved him because he nourished no envy in anyone, and he was poor for good, acceptable reasons—his enormous family, which drove him to drink.

Wai could never understand what the Peace Corps was all about. It went against everything he had learned about life; there was something preposterous, something dangerous, about a rich white man living in his town and talking about working with him, helping him make more money—for nothing. He knew that there were strings attached, that he would end up compromised, his integrity flawed. No, no, no. No thanks.

Trying to sneak in the back door, I planted a small garden with four or five of his children. On planting day we were followed up to the garden site by Wai's mother's pet pig, and as we planted he harvested. What the pig hadn't rooted up, the first heavy winter rains washed away a couple of weeks later.

A year passed. One day I overheard



ALREADY LIVING POOR

I got my Peace Corps application at the post office in Red Bluff, Calif., put it on the table in the kitchen, and walked around it for 10 days without touching it, as though it were primed to detonate —as indeed it was—trying to convince myself that for a 48-year-old farmer the idea of Peace Corps service was impractical and foolhardy.

I had read that a Peace Corps Volunteer would live at the level of the people with whom he worked and that they would be poor. Well, I could do that; I had been living poor for years. I had read that the Peace Corps was desperate for agricultural people. Good. That's all I knew. I had raised pigs, corn, alfalfa, beans and pasture, had laid out orchards, leveled land, and put in wells. And I liked farming. I liked being outside; rows of growing corn, cattle grazing on green pastures, the dusty excitement of a grain harvest—these things were like music to me.

Finally I filled out the application and sent it to Washington. And I was accepted; Sargent Shriver wanted me to go to Ecuador.

—Moritz Thomsen

Ramón talking with someone. "Ay, that poor man, Wai. The fish aren't biting and his kids haven't eaten for a couple of days." Wai, 50 cents in debt to Alvaro, the storekeeper, had no more credit; but my credit was still good. I bought 10 pounds of rice and some beans and took them up to Wai's house. Wai was out fishing; I left the packages with Gloria, his wife. About two weeks later gourds full of shrimp and oysters began arriving at my house every afternoon, five and six pounds at a time. Wai, it turned out, was splitting his catch with me. I went up to his house on Sunday, thanked him, and explained that since I had no plans for opening a seafood restaurant, I was giving away 90 per cent of what he brought me.

Later in that same month Wai came to my house on a Saturday night. He had been drinking a little, which was about the only way he could ever talk to me easily. He began to thank me for the rice, but he choked up, stopped talking, and suddenly burst into tears. When he could speak again, he told me that I was the only one in town who had helped him and that I was his friend forever. For a dollar's worth of rice and beans, I figured it was the biggest bargain of my life. He told me that he had talked everything over with his wife and mother, and they had decided that there would be no danger in working with me. "The truth is," Wai said, "you were like a god out of heaven to us." Since I was already secretly convinced that Wai was some primitive deity, it turned into a real confrontation of the gods.

Well, we began to work together in various little projects, but none of them was very successful. He couldn't figure out the relationship that I wanted to develop, one that would teach him independence and a reliance on his own abilities. I wanted him to get into something that would sustain him after I was gone. But he couldn't see it that way. He gave me his friendship and *mates* of shrimp, and I was his *patrón;* he came to me when he was in trouble. About once a month he would show up when he knew that I was going into Esmeraldas. He needed half a pound of fishline or a mill for grinding corn or a bottle of worm medicine for one of his children. He never questioned whether I would bring him the things he needed.

His beautiful old mother, the Señora Pancha, stopped me on the beach one day. She needed a sewing machine, one with a pedal. Would I please bring it to her the next time I went to Quito? "No," I told her. "I don't have that much money; it's impossible."

"When it comes," she said, "I'll patch your clothes; the way you walk around is scandalous."

Every day she combed the beach after the high tide, looking for Indian gold. "How much gold have you got?" I asked her. "Give me your gold and I'll sell it; if there's enough I'll bring you the machine."

"I want to leave the gold to my children," she explained. "It's not good for a mother to die and have nothing to leave her children." She produced a small glass bottle from some hidden pocket in some hidden skirt and poured the gold into my hand, little flakes of gold that she had found through the months, an Indian nose ring, a twisted object like a spoon.

"Sell your gold," I said. "You can make much more money sewing clothes, and leave your children real money instead."

"Take it," she said, with perfect trust.

In Quito a jeweler appraised the gold at around $12; I told one of the Peace Corps secretaries about the problem and she wrote to her father, who sent me another $15. I went back and made an elaborate deal with Señora Pancha; she was to repair my worn-out pants for the rest of my life. About a month later I brought her a new sewing machine. It was something she had dreamed about owning for 25 years, at least, but she had accepted it as naturally as a glass of water. Didn't the family have a *patrón* now, Don Martín, who took care of all their needs? A few days later I was working up on the farm with brand new clothes made out of old feed bags, and you could tell that she regarded me as someone as big and monumental as her son, for everything was double size. Hoeing weeds I looked like a ship under full sail.

Wai's projects? I brought him a simple and beautiful little stool carved out of a single block of wood by the Jivaro Indians in the Amazon Basin. He copied it with his machete and a tool that he used for making canoes, and in a few months he was turning out one or two a week. But I was soon glutted with stools. I sold about 15 to other Volunteers but could find no store in Quito that would pay the $2 that we figured we had to get.

Wai was afraid of the chicken business. It took two years of watching Ramón and Orestes cleaning up on their eggs before he was willing to try it. Finally he started clearing jungle behind his house for corn, and one day he asked me to bring him some chickens. He built a drunken chicken coop, so leaning and erratic, so oblivious to all the laws of gravity, that when he showed it to me, we both broke down into hoots of laughter. It was unbelievable. "Oh, well," I

told him, "I guess the chickens won't know the difference."

This project was a total flop. He had the corn but lacked the money for protein supplement. He felt that supplying his 30 chickens with protein was my job, but I didn't have the money either. And actually he never really believed that chickens needed a supplement. Giving them pure corn and keeping them locked up was so revolutionary that the mind boggled; he couldn't go any further.

Most of the chickens grew up finally, but they never went into paying production, and Wai's son Clever kept stealing the eggs to buy candy. After a few months, feeling the necessity for a good drunk, Wai sold a few of his hens for a party; after that he had a party every week until the hens were gone. Under the circumstances it was the best course.

* * * * *

Rhythm of Rio Verde

March was the poorest time of year in Río Verde, the time before the shrimp harvest began, and there was probably not $5 in cash in the whole town. Many nights the street was deserted by 7:30, the radios dead and the people sleeping. Perhaps one or two young men filled with feisty and lustful thoughts wandered the street, dreaming of a beckoning hand at a candlelit window, but by nine they too had given up.

The light plant had been broken down for four months, and at night the bamboo houses showed black and deserted looking against the stars or glowed coldly silver in moonlight. It was deathly quiet

except for the occasional crying of a baby; overhead in moonlight the sea birds circled the town catching the updraft from the shore winds as they struck the hill. All night long the birds floated above the town; *tijeras* they are called because of their long scissor-like tails.

When I go to bed at eight I feel like hitting the deck by four, and many times I was the first man awake in town. After a cup of coffee I used to walk out on the dock and watch the sky begin to brighten over the hills. The river caught the first light and seemed to hold more than the sky, and then out past the sand bar the sea began to glow palely.

The town came awake with the roosters announcing the day. The sound of the roosters used to be raucous and disturbing, but when there were Peace Corps roosters in that brassy overture, it was like music to me. ("Ah *dios mío,*" Alexandro said, "how I love to lie in bed in the morning darkness and listen to my roosters sing.") They challenged each other in town and in Palestina across the river, philosophizing, proclaiming their existence like a celebration.

The first fishermen walked barefoot down the street, in their tattered work clothes and big straw hats, carrying paddles, furled sails, and a ball of string or a shrimp net. The pump in town began its bleak squawking as the kids appeared with gourds to collect brine water for washing. Don Julio in an undershirt, the head of the town council, washed in the pump and walked the length of the town like a watchdog checking things out and then hoed weeds in the street. The weeds were knee-high, and Don Julio was a realist. He went inside and stood a long time in the window gazing out over the ocean.

Alvaro opened his store; smoke drifted out of the kitchens and hung over the houses in the still air. The children shopped for breakfast, perhaps trading an egg for a half pound of rice or a chunk of brown sugar mixed with coconut. The farmers left for the cornfields or the banana plantings. The sun came up and the vultures clustered in the tops of palm trees or on the beach with their wings spread open, drying themselves out like badly washed laundry. The birds cried in the salt grass, harsh, rasping Ecuadorian bird cries. One outside the back door called to me every day; according to Lucho, it was the bird who announces a death. Go away, bird!

Lastly, the teenagers appeared in the streets wandering up and down like lost souls. The day had begun, an unchanging day full of very small surprises hardly worth finding out about.

And this rhythm of life was closely tied to the past; we were living on an enormous garbage dump of pre-Incan clay fragments. The plaza, bulldozed out of the hill by a highway Cat, was almost pure fragments—broken pieces of pots, children's tops, ceremonial whistles, heads, torsos, and feet of human and animal figures. Farther up the hill Alexandro could hardly plant his corn for the fragments in his field, and in the gardens almost every shovelful of dirt held some reminder of the town's ancient life. The cemetery appeared to have been in continual use for over 2,000 years; the remains of a *tola,* a grave mound, still lay just over the fence.

When school let out three months earlier, the town's more ambitious or desperate kids gradually disappeared—Wilson, Jorge, Pancho, Ricardo, Ernesto, a couple of others—the country kids with no work who were finally driven away. I used to see them wandering in the streets of Esmeraldas with that same vacant, dreaming look, in a gentle shock.

"How are you doing, Ernesto?"

"Oh, fine, I have a job when the banana boats are in."

"Well, that's great."

"Yes, it's good to have a job. . . . Listen, Don Martín can you loan me a nickel; I haven't eaten yet today. . . . Tell Mother I'll be back in the time of carnival."

But most of them never did come back, and in time dreamed of an idyllic childhood, remembering running the bulls, riding the breakers, or the sound of the sea and the dry sound of the wind in the palm trees, or some odd but vivid sunset that lived in the memory—forgetting the hunger and the sameness of the days.

* * * * *

Rumors and resentments

I had always been aware of the jealousies in the town, but now I began to see that I had underestimated their power to order the lives of the people. It began to get through to me. Ramón Arcos, drunk, buttonholed me on the street. He wanted 10 sucres to get drunker and when I said "No," he said I was a bad man who helped only the rich like Ramón Prado and Alexandro. "Rich?" I cried. "They're the poorest people in town." But, of course, it wasn't true any more. Ramón was about to get his 100th chicken, and Alexandro was up to 70. A year ago they had been among the poorest people; now they were about to be the richest. There was real dissatisfaction in Río Verde about the job I was doing, and every day I heard reports of my favoritism. Rumors reached me that a couple of old wise guys who knew all about the Peace Corps were telling everyone that I was making money off the people, that the chickens I sold should be gifts, and that the loans I was making did not have to be repaid. It was part of my job to give people money, they said.

It was a curious, back-biting time. Everyone was angry and jealous of Ramón and Alexandro, who were each selling about 40 eggs a day. I was putting Miguel on my chicken list for the new chickens, but I hadn't put Milton's name down. I was spending all my time working on Ramón's farm. (He had rented 10 acres from Don Julio for $2.50 a year.) I was helping Wai make stools to sell but had rebuffed Lucho when he wanted to make stools, too. Orestes had said, "To hell with the gringo; I don't have to pay back any of the money for the chickens if I don't want to." Pancho had said, "I am bored with these damned chickens and would like to get rid of them." Miguel had said, "——." I tried to ignore all of these small town, whispered stories, but in the back of my mind I was growing suspicious and uncertain.

* * * * *

Premature conference

The Peace Corps office in Quito invited me to take part in the termination proceedings of my group. I would be practically a guest, since I had been sick and I still had five months or so to make up. But in a rather untypical example of mindless Peace Corps bureaucracy, I was told to go through the motions of terminating, just as though I weren't going back to Río Verde.

My God, was it almost over? This was one of the few things we had in common, a feeling of amazement that the contract was almost fulfilled and that it was time to go home.

I sneaked into the Heifer office one morning and typed out a letter requesting an extension of one year in Río Verde. I typed it all out, signed it, and tore it up; and then I went to Río Verde and thought real hard for another month and typed the letter out again. There wouldn't be anyone crying and weeping when I left *my* town—except maybe with joy to see me go.

Additional excerpts will appear in future issues.

Tunisian structures

were of special interest to Volunteer **Tim Mitchell** when he was an architect-planner for Tunisia's public works ministry. Mitchell, who served in Tunisia from 1966 until last July, was enthusiastic about the possibility of "using traditional forms as a point of reference in developing modern Tunisian responses to architectural and planning demands." Presented here are some of the traditional forms which he found useful. Mitchell took these photographs during his travels around the north African republic, and he acknowledges that not all the significant places and structures of Tunisia are represented.

In southern Chenini, a boy stands next to a wrought iron window grill which might have been carried home by a villager working in the big city.

Even from a distance the neighborhood mosque was hard to miss. This one on the island of Djerba, off the southeast coast of Tunisia, grows out of a surrounding terrace that also collects cistern water. In the open countryside the most striking forms are often reserved for the most significant buildings.

A storehouse in southern Ksar Haddada consists of barrel vaulted chambers joined by common sidewalls. Semi-urban settlements such as this are often agricultural centers. The storage buildings are the more permanent structures; housing consists of portable tents or earth dug-outs.

On the island of Djerba, workshops for weavers are a unique arrangement of common construction done with available materials simply applied. The common techniques displayed by such scattered non-communities show the development of organizational skills.

From a high back street in the town of Le Kef, the domes of an important mosque establish a frame of reference for the distant valley panorama.

Lower on the hill, at the entrance to
the same mosque, the panorama is closed off
by subordinate buildings for pilgrims.
Here the domes assume a secondary role and
the minaret dominates the main street.

In southern Chenini, elaborate doors guard individual storerooms. Although construction is necessarily unsophisticated, the essential idea—a locked door—is clear.

Current action in Congress

Conference committee action in the Congress will be necessary before the Peace Corps knows how much money it will have for fiscal year 1970 (already three months old) and whether it will have authority to supervise a small version of an exchange Peace Corps.

The House Foreign Affairs Committee reported the Peace Corps bill to the floor without cutting a cent of the $101.1 million requested. (The request was already $900,000 less than what was appropriated to run the Peace Corps in FY 1969.)

When it reached the floor Sept. 9, the bill withstood an attempt by Iowa Congressman H. R. Gross to cut the authorization by $11 million. The full budget was defended by Florida Congressman Dante Fascell, among others, who noted that: "For every $1 million that you cut the administration request, you must reduce the program about 118 people. So you can use your own judgment and make your own program if you will. But I respectfully submit to you that the present request should be supported because there has been careful consideration by this administration; and because over a period of time under the previous administration the request and appropriation have been scaled downward; and there was a tightening in the administration; and because the program has been successful in areas and on matters that are fundamental to the kind of social, educational and health development programs that we would all like to see in developing countries."

Congressman Cornelius Gallagher of New Jersey, who co-sponsored the legislation in the House creating the Peace Corps, said, "For those it (Peace Corps) has assisted, there is no finer ambassador from the United States than the volunteer Peace Corpsman.

"I have had the opportunity to meet with many of our Peace Corps Volunteers. The chance to do so has been an inspiration. These young men and women perform their tasks not because somebody else is doing it, not because it is materially rewarding to do it, but in the words of President Kennedy, because it is right to do it.

"And if we in Congress are to do what is right, we will pass the Peace Corps bill before us, pass it without reservation, but with knowledge that we are funding a corps for whom the pursuit of peace is a full-time job."

Meanwhile, Congressman Wayne Hays of Ohio successfully attached an amendment prohibiting the Peace Corps from spending any money on an exchange Peace Corps, that is, bringing foreign nationals to the U.S. to work on a voluntary basis.

In effect, the amendment would bar the Peace Corps from operating the Volunteers to America program which has been under the State Department for two years and was recently transferred to the Peace Corps by executive order, a move resented by a number of Congressmen who felt such a transfer of authority should have been handled by the legislative branch. Peace Corps Director Joe Blatchford had stated in earlier committee hearings that he expected to spend about $100,000 on such a program.

But Hays, co-author of the Hays-Fulbright Act which sends scholars abroad, argued: "This (Volunteers to America) is a pilot program, and I want it to stay in the cultural affairs division of the State Department, and not be put over into the Peace Corps where it can grow like Topsy, and wind up God Almighty knows what."

Congressman John Flynt, Jr. of Georgia said: "If there is merit to this proposal—and I doubt seriously if there is any merit in it—for a reverse Peace Corps, then let the State Department come before Congress in an orderly fashion and ask the Foreign Affairs Committee to specifically authorize it with authorizing legislation."

In committee sessions no language was added to the Peace Corps bill giving or denying authority to operate an exchange program. As Congressman Ross Adair of Indiana explained: "In the (committee) report we simply suggest that we do not object if the Director of the Peace Corps elects to use not more than $100,000 from the existing funds for the exchange Peace Corps.

"This, I should point out, would in no way increase the authorization by $100,000. The Director would have to find the money in existing funds or the funds which we authorize now for fiscal year 1970. If this restricting language should remain in the bill, there is a possibility that the continuation of this program might not be funded any place at all and, thus, it would die.

"The exchange Peace Corps is a program which has some merit. It needs to be approached with a great deal of caution as has been done and will continue to be done. I think we ought not to deny the Director of the Peace Corps this small bit of flexibility."

But Hays' amendment passed on voice vote; then on a roll call vote the House by 281 to 52 approved the budget of $101.1 million.

Studying the Peace Corps on the Senate side, the Foreign Relations Committee on Sept. 10 approved the bill extending the Peace Corps for a year but cut its budget back to $92.8 million. After action on the Senate floor, a conference of the two Houses will be necessary to iron out the differences in the bill.

Country directors meet in Washington

Summoned by letter and cable, Peace Corps directors from 61 countries flew into Washington in mid-September for the first such worldwide staff conference ever held. Their task: to add final form and polish to Director Joe Blatchford's "new directions" for the Peace Corps.

Missing only was Ed White, country director in Libya, whose travel plans ran afoul of a coup d'état.

"Let's get down to work," Blatchford told the directors right off. "How can we best serve the needs of the world—and the United States—in the 1970s?"

Much discussion centered on the director's plan to field expanded numbers of skilled, older Volunteers—including a trial group of 200 to go overseas with their families.

Skilled Volunteers, mostly blue collar workers and farmers, could soon comprise 30 per cent of Volunteers instead of the current 5 per cent,

Deputy Director Tom Houser said.

After a full week of meetings—at a dairy farm turned motel in nearby Fredericksburg, Va.—the country directors returned to Washington for a White House reception with President Nixon and ambassadors from countries served by the Peace Corps. Then they were to travel to New York where Blatchford was to present U.N. Secretary General U Thant with a letter from the President promising U.S. support for the concept of international voluntary service.

A full report on the conference and on changes in Peace Corps staffing and programming will be in next month's VOLUNTEER.

CORRECTION

THE VOLUNTEER regrets the errors made in last month's account (Memorandum) of one of Buck MacAdoo's painting projects. The Niger flag consists of three horizontal bands of color —orange, white and green—with a single orange circle in the middle of the white band; not orange and blue as stated. Also, MacAdoo was painting the continuous replica of the flag around a chief's house, not a well, as with his other projects. The villagers' enthusiasm about placing orange dots everywhere was not misreported, however.

Letters *to the Volunteer*

In defense of 'spirit'

To THE VOLUNTEER:

Discussions with "cross-section" groups and reports from VOLUNTEER correspondents can occasionally be misleading. And, unfortunately, the July issue of THE VOLUNTEER was deceptive in its article about Peace Corps in Libya. According to someone, "Enthusiasm for Libya and Volunteer spirit are almost nonexistent." Yet, according to some of us, enthusiasm is high. We would be among the first to admit that we have had difficulties with bureaucrats of several nationalities and with a few communities. Despite these problems, we have been accepted as friends (in traditional Arabic fashion) and as educators (with the usual corresponding respect).

We are not certain what the article implied by "Volunteer spirit." If one means *esprit de corps* with primary concern about Peace Corps itself, then we acknowledge the article's accuracy. If one means a feeling of relevance of one's work and enthusiasm about one's role with the community, then we do sense "Volunteer spirit."

SIGNED BY 12 VOLUNTEERS

Libya

A word from the provinces

To THE VOLUNTEER:

As a staff member, my letter may automatically be suspect. But at the risk of being thought biased, I feel it important that I respond to what our Volunteer correspondents said about the Peace Corps in Libya (July VOLUNTEER).

I think it is clear to most everyone in Libya connected with the Peace Corps that the whole country has been painted with the Tripoli environs' brush. What has been described by our correspondents as a lack of spirit of voluntarism is accurate insofar as it speaks about a small, vocal group of single Volunteers trapped in the familiar syndrome of the Volunteer having to live a double life, that of a Peace Corps Volunteer and a citified expatriate.

What our correspondents unaccountably overlooked, however, is the degree to which this phenomenon is localized. Of the 50 Volunteers in my area (Cyrenaica), for example, only two have gone home, and they did not resign. The same is true for the Fezzan which encompasses the Sahara sites. I would hate to think that the many readers of THE VOLUNTEER get the idea that the Peace Corps in Libya is on the brink of disaster due to an accurate description of a relatively small group of people.

ROBERT P. PEARSON
Associate Director

Benghazi, Libya

Following local pace

To THE VOLUNTEER:

Throughout training and in contacts with Peace Corps staff after that, Volunteers are constantly reminded that it is very important for them to try to meet the social requirements of the society they live in and the people they come in contact with on their jobs and in their spare time. Social acceptance, it is stressed, is necessary if the Volunteer wants to understand people of another culture and if he wants to be an effective agent of change.

I wonder if this also applies to Peace Corps staff. During his recent visit to Kenya, the director, Mr. Blatchford, visited me; and together we visited a Kenyan farmer. Was it necessary to have a dozen newspaper reporters and photographers along, as well as all the Peace Corps Kenya staff and numerous others I had never met? Or was it proper socially to rush around this small farm taking pictures and then leave without taking the time to sit down with the farmer and the Kenyan (host country nationals) staff and discuss with them what they thought were the problems being faced in Kenya and possible solutions to these problems?

In a country where the pace of life is slow and relaxed, this type of visit seemed a typical, high powered, American businessman type approach; and I feel both sides came away from it understanding less than they did before. I know that Peace Corps staff, especially the Peace Corps Washington staff, are very busy people. But I don't think they can learn as much by rushing around glancing at dozens of projects as they could by sitting down with people and taking the time required to get their feelings about these projects.

JIM DE VRIES

Nyeri, Kenya

'Penny-pinching policies'

To THE VOLUNTEER:

The "new policies" which are proclaimed to "untie some apron strings" (July VOLUNTEER) seem to be cutting costs for Peace Corps Washington while increasing the financial burden for Volunteers. I refer in particular to the elimination of booklockers, footlockers and pre-service clothing allowance. The other changed policies fit rather nicely under the

category of "eliminating paternalism" while these do not. They are legitimate needs of Volunteers, the presence or absence of which affects the decision to join the Peace Corps. Country directors may have some latitude in these matters (depending on the decision of a special committee), but this does not help the person who receives his invitation to train without knowing what support he can expect from the Peace Corps and what he will have to provide himself. If he does not have a bank account to cover these expenses, he is unlikely to take the risk of joining. His only hope is that the country director, like some fairy godmother, is going to come to the rescue with special allowances, etc.

I'm afraid that the result of the elimination of this support will be that only rich young people will be able to join the Peace Corps. This is in opposition to the stated goals of the task forces to gear recruiting to a wider range of social and economic groups.

Had these policies been in effect two years ago, my husband and I would not have been able to accept the financial burden of joining the Peace Corps and would have missed two of the most valuable years of our lives. How many young people will miss the rich experiences Peace Corps provides because of these penny-pinching policies?

LINDA CLARK

Taejon, Korea

Playing peace games?

TO THE VOLUNTEER:

Few Volunteers will try to argue that Peace Corps is totally altruistic. Few of us were idealistic enough to have believed that when we volunteered. We realized that we couldn't help but be a part of U.S. foreign policy, and perhaps that is not a bad thing. There is nothing wrong, after all, with making friends for America, or anyone else, if that is all we are doing in the way of foreign policy.

What is troubling many Volunteers now, however, and especially those in Micronesia is that we no longer feel we can say that this is all we are doing. We are no longer simply making friends for America "by the way," but we appear to be being used in a very deliberate and calculated way to make friends for America for a very specific reason. What is more, we are allowed

Memorandum

TO : The field
FROM : The editors
SUBJECT: 'A nice place'

DATE: October, 1969

We often talk about "the Peace Corps world." A fourth-grader in Los Angeles had an interesting slant on it when he wrote to Rosemary Alvord, an RPCV from Korea who does public affairs work for the Peace Corps in California.

"To Mrs. Alvord,

Thank you for the interesting film on Korea. The Peace Corps sounds like a nice place."

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Europe and the Mediterranean on $5 (sometimes $16) a day became the unofficial guidebook for almost two-thirds of the Volunteers in Libya, who were traveling outside their host country when the Sept. 1 coup occurred. Air traffic into Libya was operating on a limited-travel-only basis, and Volunteers vacationing in out-of-the-way places like Athens, Paris, Madrid, Tunis and other points, plus a dozen working in training in the U.S., found themselves stuck. Full air service was expected to be restored by mid-September. Meanwhile, Volunteers whose European stays were extended beyond their vacation time received per diem.

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Here came the trash man, with a check for one-third of a readjustment allowance. The happy recipient was a Volunteer who was on home leave before starting his third year of service. The first time he received the check his sister threw it in the trash. After two days of searching in the city dump, the Volunteer gave up and asked Peace Corps headquarters to stop payment on the check and issue a new one. Then the unexpected visitor showed up.

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The U.S. isn't the only volunteer-sending country where returned volunteers are getting together. Regional groups are forming in Germany, starting with Hamburg and Berlin. In addition, the German volunteer agency has been re-organized to include two former volunteers on its advisory board. The two were selected at a conference of volunteer "electors" who had themselves been picked for the job by their fellow volunteers.

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Our favorite staff farewell notice is this one, distributed at Peace Corps headquarters recently: "Russ Davis will be leaving the post of East Asia and Pacific Director this week to return to Harvard. In the interest of staving off cirrhosis of the liver among surviving staff, and because no phone booth is available to accommodate his many friends and well-wishers, the usual party will not be held and the usual refreshments will not be served. May we suggest, then, that the usual buck might better be contributed to some worthy program such as the Sunkist-People-to-Peoples-Orange-Juice Festival. May Davis state that it has been an honor and a privilege to serve with you—and God bless." The author was Davis himself.

to make friends only in a way that the Defense Department sees as appropriate or useful.

Our uneasiness began during our in-country training in Micronesia. We were told by Peace Corps staff, old Volunteers, Trust Territory employees, and even some Micronesians that the American government is here to stay, like it or not. The islands are strategically important, especially considering U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia, and the U.S. is not about to "turn them back to the natives." (Even though according to the terms of the Unted Nations Trusteeship Agreement the "natives" have a legal right to have them back in 1970.) We liked the islands; we liked the people; we wanted to stay. We told ourselves we can still do the job we came out here to do. We can still be Peace Corps. In short, we were still naïve.

Peace Corps can no longer pretend to be a separate, nonpolitical entity maintaining its integrity and doing its own "thing." The romantic ideas of people-to-people communication, helping others to help themselves, etc. . . . is all fine rhetoric further legitimizing the presence, though indirect, of the Defense Department. But, the indirect representatives, the Peace Corps Volunteers, must fulfill their role properly. Let an economic development Volunteer give people ideas that would make them inconveniently self-sufficient, let a media Volunteer teach people to express ideas (even though some of those ideas might be embarrassing to the U.S. government), let a Volunteer lawyer embarrass a Lt. General, and you will soon see these same Peace Corps Volunteers told that suddenly there is no longer a need for them, no longer a suitable program for them.

We feel that the time has come when we must ask just what Peace Corps is, what is it supposed to represent, and just who makes the decisions as to its organization and the manner of its operation. How can we continue to teach English and build new school buildings, rationalizing that it is because these things are good in themselves, when we read in *The Washington Post* (among other places):

"It is expected that the Micronesians will be invited to help work out the new form of government, which would place the area in permanent association with the United States. A plebiscite to approve the final product would then be held. It would not offer the Micronesians a choice between independence and the new form of government—only a yes or no vote on the new government."

It is obvious that our presence on the outer islands, our help teaching, ordering supplies, giving our time and sometimes our own personal supplies and belongings in our efforts to create love, understanding and peace are well designed to bring in a lot of "yes" votes. We begin to think we are dolts—pretending we are playing our own little peace games but really only opening the doors to and making it easier for the establishment of military bases—sites for the playing of war games. The time has finally come when we are demanding answers to some of the questions of just what we are doing here before we can, in good conscience, continue our work.

ANA T. KAMMAN
Majuro, Marshall Islands

Nonverbal lessons

To THE VOLUNTEER:

"Your Actions . . . speak louder", by Melvin Schnapper (June VOLUNTEER) brought up a much overlooked part of other cultures and Peace Corps training. During training we had no introduction to nonverbal communication other than a few incidental experiences with the participating host country nationals. Many people would say that this in itself is sufficient, but they disregard the fact that the Iranians who took part in our training were trying to learn the American gestures or had already become Americanized.

Many Volunteers here agree that this area is too often considered unimportant and feel that much could be done for better understanding and nonverbal communications both in and out of Peace Corps.

H. DAVID HOOVLER
Kiakola, Shahi, Iran

Excess baggage?

To THE VOLUNTEER:

I am glad that Mike Saks (August VOLUNTEER) was able to collect 250 pounds of "local wood sculpturing and weaving" while in the Peace Corps. He can now show all his friends how worthwhile his two years were. In his argument against the new 80-pound baggage limit, he has shown one good reason why Mr. Blatchford has adopted it.

WILLIAM PURDY
Carmelo, Uruguay

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